

Foundations of Excellence – Executive Summary
Old Dominion University
July 2007

In 2003 staff from the Policy Center on the First Year of College (Policy Center) convened a group of scholars on first year (FY) experience who created nine Foundational Dimensions® that provide an aspirational model of first year experience against which institutions can measure themselves. The Policy Center staff proceeded to create an intensive self-study process and invited institutions to participate in the Foundations of Excellence (FoE). Old Dominion University (ODU) applied to participate in the third class and was accepted as one of 19 four-year institutions for the 2006-07 academic year. The self study involved creating nine dimension committees led by a steering committee composed of the chairs of the dimension committees plus additional campus experts. The committees analyzed data collected through Faculty / Staff and Student Surveys, a Current Practices Inventory (CPI), and an extensive Evidence Library. Each committee met and analyzed the data in regard to Performance Indicators (PI) established by the Policy Center. Following is an executive summary of the nine dimension reports created by each committee. Please note that the CPI data was collected on the FY class of 2005-06 and the survey data was collected on the FY class of 2006-07. In addition, the dimension reports were written and submitted before 2007-08 budgets were approved. Finally, faculty and staff have already begun implementing some of the action items so some evidence and observations may no longer be accurate.

Dimension

Philosophy – ***Foundations Institutions approach the first year in ways that are intentional and based on a philosophy/rationale of the first year that informs relevant institutional policies and practices. The philosophy/rationale is explicit, clear and easily understood, consistent with the institutional mission, widely disseminated, and, as appropriate, reflects a consensus of campus constituencies. The philosophy/rationale is also the basis for first-year organizational policies, practices, structures, leadership, department/unit philosophies, and resource allocation.***

Institutions that earn high grades on the Philosophy dimension have a philosophy statement that guides their FY program and is widely disseminated across all constituencies. The committee quickly recognized that ODU does not have a philosophy statement for the FY of college so they created one and submitted it for consideration by the Steering Committee. The philosophy statement is ready for review by the President’s Cabinet, Provost’s Council, Faculty Senate, Student Senate, and Board of Visitors and is attached to this executive summary.

Organization – ***Foundations Institutions create organizational structures and policies that provide a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated approach to the first year. These structures and policies provide oversight and alignment of all first-year efforts. A coherent***

first-year experience is realized and maintained through effective partnerships among academic affairs, student affairs, and other administrative units and is enhanced by ongoing faculty and staff development activities and appropriate budgetary arrangements.

Institutions earn good grades in the Organization dimension by creating organizational structures for the FY experience, collaborating with their colleagues across divisions of the University, using assessment evidence to improve performance, providing faculty and staff development, and adequately funding this work. While the new University College (UC) offers a unique opportunity for improving FY experiences, that opportunity was not completely realized in 2006-07. Communication across divisions is improving, as evidenced by the formation of a Cross Campus Communication group and meetings begun in summer 2007 involving all units concerned with the enrollment of the FY class, but more needs to be done to provide a seamless transition from high school through admission, orientation, and the FY of college. The committee found little evidence-based decision making, few faculty / staff development opportunities focusing on FY experiences and development of engaging pedagogies, and no rewards and recognition for faculty and staff investment in the FY. The committee also noted that limited funding will be available in 2007-08 to support faculty / staff development opportunities focusing on the FY and rewards and recognition for faculty.

Learning – Foundations Institutions deliver intentional curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students in order to develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with the desired outcomes of higher education and the institution’s philosophy and mission. Whether in or out of the classroom, learning also promotes increased competence in critical thinking, ethical development, and the lifelong pursuit of knowledge.

Institutions that earn high grades in the Learning dimension create common learning goals for FY students, document and assess the use of engaging pedagogies with FY students, document and assess learning outcomes across all sections of FY courses, address courses with high DFWI rates, and intentionally place students into appropriate FY courses. ODU has established and is currently reviewing General Education (GE) goals, but no specific goals for FY students exist. Little evidence exists that departments regularly and systematically document or assess instructional methods and their effectiveness in engaging students in learning. There are competing interests between becoming a top 100 research institution and developing engaging pedagogies for FY students. Few departments have common learning outcomes or ensure consistency in grading across course sections although several give common final exams. Participation in the FoE offered our first opportunity to review DFWI rates so there is no established program to address those concerns. ODU uses placement tests in math, writing, and foreign language and a discussion of the high DFWI rates in math courses suggested that Compass may not be placing students accurately and that a significant number of students are taking courses above their placements. Finally, while ODU offers many co-curricular programs with learning experiences, there is little evidence about how the learning outcomes are being assessed for improvement and there are few co-curricular experiences specifically targeted to FY students.

Faculty – Foundations Institutions make the first college year a high priority for the faculty. These institutions are characterized by a culture of faculty responsibility for the first year that is realized through high-quality instruction in first-year classes and substantial interaction

between faculty and first-year students both inside and outside the classroom. This culture of responsibility is nurtured by chief academic officers, deans, and department chairs and supported by the institutions' reward systems.

Institutions earn good grades on the Faculty dimension if they have senior leaders who encourage faculty to understand FY students, set learning goals for them, and engage them both in and out of class; have department chairs who do the same within the department; develop these expectations among new and continuing fulltime and adjunct faculty; and reward faculty for their efforts. While senior leaders are concerned about the success of FY students, survey respondents did not perceive that a culture among faculty that encourages engagement with FY students both in and outside of the classroom is emphasized. There have been some attempts to teach engaging pedagogies through the Center for Learning Technologies, Learning Communities (LC), and NewPAGE but no systematic effort across campus. Similarly, there is a lot of information available about FY students, particularly through the Transition to College Inventory (TCI), but it is not widely disseminated or discussed. Similarly, there is not a systematic, campus-wide program in which departments encourage faculty to adopt more engaging pedagogies, establish student learning outcomes for FY courses or learn about specific disciplinary issues for FY students. Finally, the committee found that expectations for involvement with FY students are not communicated to either continuing or new fulltime or adjunct faculty and the efforts that some faculty make are not recognized or rewarded.

Transitions – Foundations Institutions facilitate appropriate student transitions through policies and practices that are intentional and aligned with institutional mission. Beginning with recruitment and admissions and continuing through the first year, institutions communicate clear curricular and cocurricular expectations and provide appropriate support for educational success. They are forthright about their responsibilities to students as well as students' responsibilities to themselves and the institution. They create and maintain curricular alignments with secondary schools and linkages with secondary school personnel, families, and other sources of support, as appropriate.

Institutions that earn good grades in the Transitions dimension communicate well with students, parents, and high school staff and faculty about the mission for FY and academic expectations through the web, print, and in person; help FY students to make connections with faculty, upper-level students, other FY students, and campus services; and provide comprehensive academic advising for developing and aligning life and career goals with advising for course selection. Several years ago, ODU began transitioning from print to electronic communication via the web. Now, web-based communication is the primary format for most academic and cocurricular information. This can save money and be very effective but also can create challenges to FY students when the information is not correct and current or there are inconsistent formats across departments. The Student Survey indicated that there may be a disconnect between what faculty and staff believe they are communicating through the web and what students indicate they are actually receiving. Similarly, most communication with parents and others is via the web and recently the responsibility for parent programs was assigned to a specific staff member. ODU has created several opportunities such as LC, LADDERS, and mentoring programs for FY students to interact with faculty, staff, and other

FY students. The UC will coordinate and fine-tune existing programs and create additional opportunities. Once opportunities for communication and interaction are created, it is difficult to find space in Webb Center or other campus locations for informal interaction. Academic advising is now being coordinated by the UC through “triads” consisting of a college advisor, CME advisor, and CMC counselor. Communication and collaboration need to continue to improve, however.

All Students – Foundations Institutions serve all first-year students according to their varied needs. The process of anticipating, diagnosing, and addressing needs is ongoing and is subject to assessment and adjustment throughout the first year. Institutions provide services with respect for the students’ abilities, backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Institutions also ensure a campus environment that is inclusive and safe for all students.

Institutions earn good grades in the All Students dimension if they are able to identify and treat groups of students who have academic, social/personal, or safety needs and assure that FY students experience individualized attention from faculty and staff, academic support outside of class, campus involvement, and an inclusive campus environment. ODU uses a variety of measures including placement tests in math and writing as well as the TCI to identify students with academic, social, and/or safety needs. We offer a variety of academic and co-curricular programs designed to assist students with their academic and social integration into the University. These programs include an orientation program that extends from Preview through Debut, Convocation, and UNIV 100. Academic programs include UNIV 100, UNIV 120, LC, Honors College, and developmental courses. The UC coordinates many of the academic programs. Student Affairs offers a variety of co-curricular programs through Multicultural Student Services, International Student and Scholar Services, Office of Student Activities and Leadership, and the Women’s Center. Weaknesses identified in the Student Survey include a need for more out-of-class interaction with faculty as well as a need for more social integration. Student Affairs is completing a series of focus groups designed to assess and subsequently build a more involved and inclusive campus community.

Diversity – Foundations Institutions ensure that all first-year students experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and cultures as a means of enhancing their learning and preparing them to become members of pluralistic communities. Whatever their demographic composition, institutions structure experiences in which students interact in an open and civil community with people from backgrounds and cultures different from their own, reflect on ideas and values different from those they currently hold, and explore their own cultures and the cultures of others.

Institutions that earn good grades in the Diversity dimension assure that FY students experience diverse ideas and world views across both the curriculum and co-curriculum, have opportunities to interact with both faculty and students from different backgrounds and cultures, and convey to students expected behavior in a civil campus community. ODU has a good history of enrolling significant numbers of minority students, including students of low socioeconomic status and first generation students, but the question remains what is being done to develop communication and interaction among students with diverse backgrounds and views both in classes and outside of classes. A review of syllabi for GE courses might help to

answer that question. Similarly, a review of cocurricular activities would be informative as well to determine how successful we are at encouraging communication and interaction. Survey data reveal that faculty and staff perceive more opportunities than students report experiencing. Faculty and staff should expand their roles to include mentoring, advocacy, and being role models for students. They also need to create more opportunities for interaction among students with diverse backgrounds and ideas both in classes and outside of classes.

Roles and Purposes – Foundations Institutions promote student understanding of the various roles and purposes of higher education, both for the individual and society. These roles and purposes include knowledge acquisition for personal growth, learning to prepare for future employment, learning to become engaged citizens, and learning to serve the public good. Institutions encourage first-year students to examine systematically their motivation and goals with regard to higher education in general and to their own college/university. Students are exposed to the value of general education as well as to the value of more focused, in-depth study of a field or fields of knowledge (i.e., the major).

Institutions earn good grades in the Roles and Purposes dimension when they (a) effectively communicate with FY students about the purposes of higher education including personal growth, engaged citizenship, and serving the public good as well as future employment; (b) provide opportunities for FY students to explore their personal motivation for attending college; and (c) effectively communicate the rationale for GE requirements, required competencies, and requirements for entry into majors. Fewer faculty and staff than students believed that ODU was doing a good job of communicating the purposes of higher education to students. Improving communication with faculty, staff, and students is one of the goals for the UC. Faculty, staff, and students agreed that there were few opportunities for students to examine their motivations for attending college. The Master Advisor program would help to expand opportunities for this self-examination. Few faculty, staff or students believed that there was much communication about the rationale of GE courses and required competencies while most agreed that the communication of major requirements was much better. Plans in the UC will help to address all of these communication issues.

Improvement – Foundations Institutions conduct assessment and maintain associations with other institutions and relevant professional organizations in order to achieve ongoing first-year improvement. This assessment is specific to the first year as a unit of analysis—a distinct time period and set of experiences, academic and otherwise, in the lives of students. It is also linked systemically to the institutions’ overall assessment. Assessment results are an integral part of institutional planning, resource allocation, decision-making, and ongoing improvement of programs and policies as they affect first-year students. As part of the enhancement process and as a way to achieve ongoing improvement, institutions are familiar with current practices at other institutions as well as with research and scholarship on the first college year.

Institutions that achieve good grades in the Improvement dimension assess their FY programs and use those assessment results to improve practices; assess how students use their time, connect with faculty, use campus services, and attend classes and use those results to improve campus understanding of how those behaviors impact student success; and engage in

professional development activities both on campus and off campus to learn how to improve the FY. ODU chose to focus on the assessment of five campus programs: Advising, LC/MAP, Orientation (Preview – U100), FYE Hall, and Academic Skills (Early Alert, TCI, LADDERS, tutoring, study skills workshops). Several programs (Advising, LC, Preview) have good assessment instruments and use the data to improve the programs. Most programs need to create assessment plans and several need to create or review their goals and objectives as well. There is little evidence that assessment activities have addressed or helped to improve student success through a focus on how students use their time, connect with faculty, use campus services, or attend class. Similarly, there is little evidence of any significant participation in professional development related to FY experiences, either on campus or off campus.

Summary

The table above offers definitions of each of the nine foundational dimensions followed by an assessment of how ODU measures up against the definition. The report offers an honest assessment of our FY programs against an aspirational model by a group of campus experts based on evidence gathered specifically for the FoE project. The first recommended action item is to develop, approve, and disseminate a philosophy statement. The ODU Philosophy Statement was developed and is included below, followed by the action items recommended across the nine committees.

Philosophy Statement for the First Year of College at Old Dominion University

Old Dominion University is committed to a first year that utilizes student, faculty and staff interactions to promote personal growth, learning, and academic success among first year students. The first year experience facilitates a successful transition to college life within a challenging, yet supportive environment by fostering academic discipline, intellectual curiosity, personal and civic responsibility, ethical behavior, campus involvement, and respect for diversity. Through the development of relevant skills, knowledge, talent and goals, the first year lays the foundation for effective leadership in the campus, local, and global communities.

Based on this Philosophy, the following Tentative Goals were developed by the Philosophy Committee for the First Year of College at ODU:

1. Provide a relevant and coherent introduction to the intellectual purposes of a college education so that students have a broader understanding of the value, meaning and responsibilities of being an educated person in today's society.
2. Promote the understanding of academic expectations and provide for the enhancement of college level teaching and learning strategies and the habits necessary for a successful transition to college.

3. Provide opportunities for students to develop self-reliance and personal responsibility for learning and the motivation to persist and succeed.
4. Enable students to comprehend the importance of understanding their own skills, interests, and values in making choices about their future, and provide resources to assist students in this endeavor.
5. Establish organizational structures to ensure that students understand the campus environment, its values and resources, as well as University policies and procedures so that they can successfully negotiate this new experience.
6. Involve students, faculty and staff in activities that enhance students' learning, social development and sense of campus involvement, including opportunities for experiencing diversity and developing effective citizenship both on and off campus.

Final Recommended Action Items

The nine dimension committees produced 108 recommended action items. The leadership team reviewed them and completed a thematic analysis of the items that produced seven themes. Subgroups of the Steering Committee reviewed the action items within each theme and combined, edited, deleted, and ranked them as “most important,” “important,” or “less important.” Following are the final action items within each theme ranked as most important or important. They are numbered for reference only – they are not in priority order. Please note that work has already begun on several of the action items that are marked with an asterisk (*).

Policy Action Items

1. Approve, disseminate, and implement the Philosophy Statement and related Goals for the first year (FY) experience at Old Dominion University (ODU). The Philosophy Statement and Goals will create the foundation for the University's approach to FY students and communicate the University's commitment to FY students to faculty, staff, and students. The Philosophy statement should be approved by the President's Cabinet, Provost's Council, Faculty Senate, Student Government Association, and the Board of Visitors.
2. Review and revise or establish policies that support the FY experience.
 - Change Withdrawal Policy Deadline to the tenth week of classes to allow additional time for advising, interventions with students and compliance with the financial aid policies.
 - Expand the Early Alert Response system to include all undergraduate courses and require posting midterm grades for all General Education (GE) courses. (* Beginning with the fall 2007 semester, faculty teaching 100- and 200-level courses have been asked by the Provost to post an interim grade via Leo Online by the beginning of the fifth week of classes.)

- Enforce the placements into math courses and review the score ranges associated with those placements. (* IRA and UC staff are monitoring the math placements for the 2007 entering FY class.)
 - Explore the possibility of requiring a minimum C- in prerequisite courses in order to proceed into the subsequent course. (* Provost Isenhour recommends a C as the minimum grade)
3. Review and revise policies and procedures in two areas to encourage, recognize, and reward faculty involvement with FY students.
- Review and revise faculty recruitment and appointment policies to include expectations for working with FY students for faculty who will teach them.
 - Review and revise faculty evaluation, promotion, and tenure policies and procedures to reward faculty who teach FY students.

Practice Action Items

Several subcategories were established to focus the many and varied action items in this category and develop best practices that support the FY experience.

4. Orientation – Incorporate into orientation discussions about the meaning / rationale and importance of GE requirements as foundational skills / courses that provide preparation for the major and future work (Preview / Debut / Convocation / UNIV 100). (* This was done in all FY Preview sessions in summer 2007 and will be expanded upon in future years.)
5. Advising – Complete the process of creating positions and appointing the “triad” of advisors in each college (UC student success advisor; college academic advisor; CMC career counselor) to complement the work of faculty advisors. (* Searches are underway for two advisor positions that have been established and will be assigned to the colleges. In addition, two advisors from CME will be reassigned to the colleges. These actions will complete the triad of advisors in each college; two of the colleges will have a fulltime student success advisor and the remaining four colleges will share two success advisors.)
6. Curriculum and Pedagogy – Conduct further research on the factors related to high DFWI rates and discuss creating more engaging pedagogies as one way to reduce the DFWI rates. In addition:
- Re-establish the Writing Across the Disciplines initiative
 - Involve faculty in redesigning the university orientation course (UNIV 100)
 - Systematically communicate (e.g., on syllabi) Academic Honesty policies
 - Systematically communicate (e.g., on syllabi) rationale for GE courses
 - Recommend homework assignments, especially in GE courses, that emphasize solving real world problems from multidisciplinary perspectives

7. Co-curriculum – Develop goals for student learning that deal with the experiences of FY students as they make the transition to college life. These goals should include acquisition of social and cultural perspectives that are obtained in out-of-classroom learning experiences, as well as skills needed to complete academic challenges. Encourage, recognize, and reward more faculty participation in the co-curriculum.
8. Diversity – Create and disseminate a statement of values about diversity that will be addressed in all curricular and co-curricular activities and publications. The values statement should cover the full range of diversity and should address inclusiveness beyond numerical accomplishments. The campus climate regarding diversity should be assessed periodically to identify areas that require improvement.
9. Assessment – Create a culture of evidence-based decision making regarding all FY programs and initiatives. A culture of evidence-based decision making would require:
 - All UC units to post comprehensive assessment plans and reports in WEAVE that support making improvements in FY programs.
 - All major programs that involve significant contact with FY students, whether created in the UC or other area, to post comprehensive assessment plans and reports in WEAVE that support making improvements in FY programs.
10. Funding, Recognition, and Reward – Secure funding for improving FY programs and initiatives and for rewarding faculty.
 - Expand the number of fulltime lecturer positions to replace adjunct professors who teach many GE and FY courses. Recruit and hire lecturers who are committed to teaching FY students using engaging pedagogies.
 - Fund awards for faculty, adjunct faculty, and advisors who do exceptional work with FY students.

Communication Action Items

11. Collaborate (primarily UC and Admissions) on the development of a comprehensive and coordinated plan for communicating with FY students electronically (supplemented with print and other media as necessary) from recruitment through admission, orientation, and the FY of college.
 - Create links on the University home page for prospective students and parents so it is clear where they go for information the first time they click on the ODU homepage. (* This has been accomplished.)
 - Ensure that FY students are provided the information they need when they need it (e.g., admission, orientation, registration, UIN, domicile status, financial aid information, housing information, Monarch Creed, Academic Honesty).
 - Create a single integrated publication that takes students through the admission process (“next steps” format).

- Create a single integrated publication that takes students from admission through the orientation and enrollment process and through the FY of college (calendar format).
 - Create a resources publication identifying where to go for what service and how to get there via the web, phone, or in person.
12. Collaborate (primarily UC and Admissions) on the development of a comprehensive and coordinated plan for communicating with the parents of FY students electronically (supplemented with print and other media as necessary) from recruitment through admission, orientation, and the FY of college. Recognize the important role parents and family play in college decisions throughout the process.

Organization Action Items

13. Establish a campus-wide Student Information Center focused on the needs of FY students that operates as a one-stop-shop for referrals to campus resources and services beyond those offered by the Campus Information Desk in Webb Center.
14. Charge the Commission on Enrollment (CoE) to lead the effort to improve communication among all of the units that work with FY students from the time they first contact the University, through the admission process, and from admission through the orientation process and the FY of college.
15. Provide resources to support the centralization and communication of all tutoring services across campus through Tutoring Central that was established as part of the UC. (* The UC received additional funding for the 2007-08 budget and designated an additional \$30,000 for tutoring.)
16. Create a centralized high school connection resource coordinated by a senior-level administrator to collaborate with area high schools to improve academic preparation of students for college.

Professional Development Action Items

17. Create a culture that values the FY experience and recognizes the importance of FY success as the basis for improved academic performance and student success. Begin with a summer retreat (perhaps the President's Administrative Retreat) in 2007 and include discussion of the FY experience in the President's 2007 State of the University Speech. (* The Administrative Retreat included an update on the UC and focus groups on the UC and Retention)
18. Fund and implement the Master Advisor Program and reward and recognize those who successfully complete the program. The Master Advisor Program should focus on the multiple roles advisors play as they assist students with exploring and making decisions about their course, major, and career directions.

19. Design faculty and staff development programs that engage all of those who work directly with FY students and measure their success (e.g., FY Experience Certificate Program).
- Recognize and reward those who successfully complete the program.
 - Emphasize development of engaging pedagogies.
20. Enhance the faculty orientation program to include a focus on teaching FY students.
21. Provide faculty mentors for adjunct faculty.

Program Action Items

22. Rebuild and fund the Learning Communities (LC) program to facilitate the transition from high school to college by collaborating with faculty who teach FY students.
- Develop specific goals that can be advertised to students and outcomes that can be measured.
 - Incorporate faculty development opportunities.
 - Explain the goals and structures of higher education, including GE and the major, and how those help students to transition into the world of work.
 - Establish better ties with Student Affairs (living-learning communities, community service projects).
 - Include a college-specific orientation course in each community.
23. Rebuild and fund the university orientation course (UNIV 100) to facilitate the transition from high school to college, by collaborating with faculty who teach FY students.
- Develop specific goals that can be advertised to students and outcomes that can be measured.
 - Incorporate faculty development opportunities.
 - Focus on academic and social integration.
 - Explain the goals and structures of higher education, including GE and the major, and how those help students to transition into the world of work.
 - Required topics would include:
 - transition strategies (time management, learning styles, library tours, coping skills)
 - campus resources (financial aid, judicial affairs, tutoring services)
 - career planning (goal setting, internships)
 - connections (clubs, social events, community service)
24. Establish a “Guaranteed” Service Learning Project that might be associated with LC and/or UNIV 100.

Facility Action Items

25. Improve use and usability of Webb Center to establish an environment that is more conducive to faculty and student interactions. Provide an area for the congregation of larger audiences. Reorganize current office locations in Webb Center to allow for more student-centric activities.
26. Construct a facility to house UC and supply adequate space for growth of the college and expansion of its services.

Summary

Much good work has been done to create an FY experience but much remains to be done to further develop the FY experience to help more students to be successful. ODU already offers many of the best practices in FY programs, including orientation, advising, LC, and UNIV 100. We also offer a couple of unique programs including the new triad of advisors assigned to each college and use of the TCI to identify and treat at-risk FY students. Most of the existing programs need some fine-tuning to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. Other programs need to be added, including faculty development, reward, and recognition for engaging pedagogies; Tutoring Central; master advisor program; and acceptance and dissemination of the Philosophy statement. All will help to create a culture that values and recognizes the importance of the FY of college. The UC provides an excellent administrative structure and home for many of these programs.